

SIT YOUR MEMORY ON YOUR DESK
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"We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it" - Samuel Johnson.

Everyone in his work gleans casually or intensively some new information every day. A surprising amount of it is retained, some is completely forgotten, and some is recalled later with difficulty and then only imperfectly.

Since every Hospital Corpsman and every Hospital Corps Officer and every Medical Service Corps Officer is to some degree an administrative assistant, it is the present objective to present a system for locating and correlating otherwise dimly recalled information that is essential to administrative assistance. With the system hereinafter outlined you can literally sit your selective memory on your desk.

Perhaps you feel that your memory is better off in your head. If so, this article is not for you - or is it?

What do you do towards locating a directive or letter seen disinterestedly 6 months - or 6 days ago - that the "old man" wants right now? Nine times out of ten, no doubt, you can put your finger right on it. How about the tenth time? That one is the reputation wrecker!

Reasonable or unreasonable, necessary or unnecessary, the fact remains that it is expected of an administrator that he retain on the tip of his tongue or the top of his memory practically all the information to which he was ever exposed.

It is the writer's contention that successful administrative assistance depends on memory, and that that memory must be backed by factual aids if necessary. Where memory stops the written substitutes must take over. In the service, substitutes for knowledge and experience are available at every turn - letters, instructions, memoranda, pamphlets, circulars, bulletins, magazines, manuals, and orders ad infinitum. But who commits them to memory? Who remembers all he has read or where he read it? Who even has access to all that is currently applicable?

Almost never in any one job are there available all the references which one could from time to time use. The disbursing officer at a station, for instance, will have the only copy of the BuSanda Manual. At a hospital, the only complete (corrected?) set of All Ships and Stations Letters will be the Personnel Office copy. The central file everywhere will retain practically all the miscellaneous letters and correspondence. Yet in these references and in the files are the tools of our trade.

But to locate a particular directive only after considerable searching is never satisfactory; and equally bad in finally locating the desired information is the nagging uncertainty - or the bland confidence - that the data discovered is the last and only directive on the subject.

Even conceding the undeniable capabilities as opposed to the multiple responsibilities in medical service, can any one person ever be completely ready with detailed information as to all the procedures in all the specialties in which he has or sometime will be called upon to assist? Such a question suggests an inevitable answer.

But how about an attempt to be ready with as many techniques and as many answers as are practicable?

It has been found by the writer that a high percentage of easy recall items can be kept in an alphabetical card file of less than two hundred 3x5 cards. A small, hinged-top, file box will hold all of them easily. Subject headings for these cards are various, and each individual must decide for himself what subjects to include. What one would want in such a ready reference file would vary with one's job and what is considered possible as a future duty assignment.

Let us take a chief, a specialist, working in the X-ray department at a naval hospital. Sea duty is ahead for him any day now. Will he be assigned to independent duty, to a large ship, or to an overseas shore station? Who can tell? Would it not be to his advantage in any case to be storing information on such subjects as reports, quarantine, physicals, immunizations, stock levels, Hospital Corps training, and VD control? Although all of these subjects are foreign to his present job, still he has the opportunity to read the "Navy Department Bulletins", "All Hands", and some of the circular letters. He will, therefore, automatically encounter some subjects which will be later of prime importance in his future billet. He could certainly profit by preparing any references which would save many hours of research and uncertainty when finally faced with independent or other duty outside his specialty.

Or let us take a laboratory technician with primary interest in his present specialty. He might include in his file, for instance, under the heading "Culture Media", on a separate card, a notation as to where the technique for preparing a special culture medium is set forth in the "Journal of Laboratory and Clinical Medicine".

A property or finance officer might include a card entitled "Nav Exos 2576" with a reference, among other references, to the discussion of this form in one of the Finance Division News Letters.

A Medical Service Corps Officer in the administration and supply group needs the largest variety, since his possible assignments require knowledge of such divergent yet correlated medical subjects as logistics, planning, training, research, accounting, commissary management, and personnel administration.

Sample entries on a few of the cards in the writer's file are shown below. The parenthetical matters are brief statements of the most important aspects of the references. Certain abbreviations for the references are used. To explain: The hyphenated numbers alone are Navy Department Bulletin items which are easily located by using the Conversion Table in the back of the cumulative editions of respective years or by following the numerical sequence at the tops of the pages of unbound issues; "C/L" stands for BuMed Circular Letter; "GO", for General Order; and "BNL" for BuMed News Letter.

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Cards when originally prepared were typed. Subsequent entries were usually written in ink but could be typed. Both sides of the card are used. Two or more cards on the same subject are used when the references are extensive. Frequently, only an erasable pencil note of a reference is made if the reference is, let us say, to a local order or a directive of limited duration. Entry of the same reference on two or more cards of the file can be made if desired.

Cards pertaining to subjects not being used in one's present job can be grouped under one title. For example, a personnel officer might group all references to financial matters, under the heading "Accounting", but a finance officer would break down such a group into separate headings. When references entered cancel previous entries, lines can be drawn through the cancelled references. The references can be checked occasionally as to being still in effect and the cards retyped when necessary.

References which, because used so often, are known like the back of one's hand, such as most of those in the Manual of the Medical Department and BuPers Manual, are not entered on the cards since this would merely duplicate the index of a well-known source. It cannot be seen how this would serve any useful purpose.

On the other hand, if adding an item to the file will save time sometime in the future, then it should be added. If you or your assistants have spent considerable time collecting data to apply to a particular set of circumstances and that same problem will arise again, then certainly a reference card on the subject is indicated.

If the time spent in preparing a card file is more than compensated by the saving in research time required later to locate specific items, then a value is finally realized. It is believed that this will be found true particularly with respect to the inclusion of references to selected AlStaCons, AlMars, local orders, and other miscellaneous directives which after a few months are most difficult to remember specifically as being applicable to an infrequent situation.

And it may be found desirable to prepare some interim index for all the latest BuMed Circular Letters and for certain items in the more recent issues of the Navy Department Bulletin. With respect to the latter, it is not recommended that every item be included - only the pertinent ones. Of course, practically all the BuMed Circular Letters are referenced sooner or later. Take C/L 43-145 for example on the subject of Work Projects. It is not reproduced in the Navy Department Bulletin or the Medical News Letter. The point is that adding such an item to one's file will enable one, when assigned at some future date to duty in the finance section of an activity which was an addressee of this letter and to which the contents are applicable, to know positively in connection with a work project that a recent directive pertaining thereto exists and that it is included specifically in the Cumulative Edition of BuMed Circular Letters.

Of unquestionable value, too, are certain other indices such as the filing index suggested by LCDR ZIMMERMAN, MSC, USN, in the last 1948 issue of the Hospital Corps Quarterly. However, his idea seems adapted more for use in the central file of a medical activity rather than for an individual, although the general idea is the same.

Also, as an expansion of an individual or activity file, one could add a section on reports. A separate card for each required report is made - with the title of the report and the form number at the top; and data as to when submitted, to whom, prepared by, via whom, number of copies required, and the directive for preparation in the body. The cards can be arranged alphabetically by title or divided by separators into groups (daily, weekly, monthly, annually, and occasionally) to indicate periods in which the reports are submitted. The backs of the cards can be used for a check-off system to indicate when the reports are forwarded.

While card files can be expanded indefinitely to serve many purposes, it is again emphasized that the file herein suggested is a small, personal index which takes surprisingly little time to keep current. The factors of time, energy, and relative usefulness must be given full consideration. It is realized that just as one may be "insurance poor" so one can be "card-file happy" too.

Finding or taking any time to prepare a card file is another matter. Various methods may be used. One is to make entries personally in ink on the cards immediately, as necessary. The "do it now" school may be partial to this system. Another is to jot down items on one's calendar pad. Every few days or whenever time permits, all outstanding items can be entered. A busier administrator could use still another method. He could make just a check mark or "O" indicating "Card" at the top of each item which he desires included in his index and his typist could enter the references for him.

Whatever method is used, the main objective is to supplement one's own memory as necessary. Therefore, in conclusion, it is suggested that if your memory does not function satisfactorily in your head that you try sitting part of it on your desk.

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